Crossing Borders. Different Culture. Different me.

Knowing some international students back home in Moscow, in Russia, I have always been curious about how it feels to be oneб so away from home, away from parents and friends, away from the environment that you've got used to. I admired how easily my international friends navigated through their challenging experiences, especially the one called "surviving in Moscow", where you can hardly expect finding anyone speaking at least a bit of English. But, as you know: "Thoughts are Things", so now I am that "international student" myself away from home and friends and familiar environment, in the country where everyone has heard about Russia (especially recently, thanks to negative political media coverage), but you can hardly find anyone who actually speaks Russian. But you know what? I've found it to be a very rewarding experience that has changed who I am and significantly shaped my worldview.

Before I came to US as an international student I have never been really exposed to such human diversity in my life, and it was really great experience to get to know people who have a different life values than I have; people who have different understanding what love is; people who have different skin color and who struggle their entire lives just because of it; who celebrate New Year not when and not how I celebrate it; who have different traditions than those I got used to in my home country (like Thanksgiving, that was such a great experience!). And I feel so excited to be a part of this diversity as well. As a part of Cultural Ambassador program with International Student and Scholar Office I was very lucky to be invited to talk about my

experience as international student and about cultural differences between my home country and US.

Before I came to US I was barely concerned about such issue as "Human Rights". I was living my careless life just enjoying what life brings my way, and intentionally trying to be away from all the injustices discussions. I'm not sure if it's because I've grown up, or it's just people who surround me in my everyday life here in US or people who I encounter on my facebook feed, but now I feel alarmed when I learn that people from several countries are banned from entry in US and are stuck at the airports, separated from their families and not knowing what's going on. I feel alarmed when Russia cancels the adoption relationship with US meaning, kids who want to live in a family now have fewer chances to have one. As a young scholar in Geography interested in urban population distribution studies, I feel alarmed when I read in the academic article about certain racial groups being intentionally cut off by real estate agencies from access to housing in certain areas. I feel alarmed when I hear that a kid with autism is kicked out of the plane just because she assumed to cause "safety concern". When I posted a video on social media from the protest at UNCC after the "muslim ban" has been enforced, some of my Russian friends asked me what I was doing there, and why I should I actually care, Russia is not on the list anyway. And to me the answer is so obvious that I was really surprised someone actually asked me that. I'm not at the point of my life to be actively involved in human rights activism, but I imagine myself doing it in future.

Overall, over my presence in US as international student, I definitely have become a better person, stronger and more independent; I have become more tolerant and understanding towards other people opinions and values; I have become friends with people of very diverse backgrounds and I'm very happy to be a part of this diversity myself; I have got an opportunity to enlarge significantly my professional network, since in a globalising world it's increasingly important to have global connections and not just regional; and most importantly, I have gained a precious experience of living abroad by myself, that has changed a lot who I am.